

Joseph Sims House
(Franklin Row)
228 South Ninth Street
(originally 2 Franklin Row)
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1186

HABS
PA,
51- PHILA,
641-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABSPA
E - PHILA
671

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOSEPH SIMS HOUSE (FRANKLIN ROW) HABS No. PA-1186

Location: 228 South Ninth Street (originally 2 Franklin Row), Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Frederick and Elisabeth A. Wynkoop.

Present Occupant: Booth, Garret and Blair, Analytic and Consulting Chemists.

Present Use: Chemical laboratory and office.

Significance: This house is the last survivor of Franklin Row, a group of ten houses built in 1809-1810 to the designs of Architect Robert Mills for John Meany and John Savage. The house was purchased from them upon its completion by Joseph Sims, a merchant. During its life the building has been used as a residence, a bookshop, and since 1935 as the office and laboratory of Booth, Garrett and Blair, America's oldest commercial laboratory. Although the interiors of the house have been altered and additions have been built at the rear, the facade remains close to its original appearance.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1809-1810.
2. Architect: Robert Mills (1781-1855).
3. Original plans and construction: For a visual observation of the row with original details, see HABS photocopy, Photo No. PA-1186-8.
4. Alterations and additions: In 1935, two minor alterations were made to the front facade - lowering of the doorway and replacement of a third story window with a double window. The house was restored in the 1970's.

Original architectural elements (fanlight, woodwork and plaster work) are now in the Architectural Study Collection at the Independence National Historical Park, Philadelphia, Pa.

- B. Historical Context: Joseph Sims was the first owner of the house. He leased the house to Ann Bilsland, a widow, who occupied it from 1811 to 1829. Booth, Garrett and Blair, the oldest commercial chemical laboratory in the nation, occupied the house from 1935 to 1966.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Sims House is a good example of an early 19th century city rowhouse. It has simple classical styling. Triple windows with blind arches and elevated entrances with fanlights are noteworthy.
2. Condition of fabric: Good, though considerably altered from original.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimension: The Joseph Sims House is a three-and-a-half story house, with a 23' x 40' front building plus piazza and rear wing. Lot size is 23' x 90'.
2. Foundations: White ashlar marble on front.
3. Walls: Red brick laid in Flemish header-over-stretcher bond on front; blind brick arches over door and center windows on first and second stories. Flat brick arches over second floor side window and third floor windows.
4. Porches, stoops, etc: The original raised front (east) stoop has been removed and lowered close to sidewalk level. At present there are two marble steps, which have been reset from the original stoop at first floor level. A simple iron railing appears to be a modern replacement of the original decorative wrought-iron railing. There was possibly a basement entry originally below the stoop.
5. Chimneys: There are two tall brick chimneys on south wall with plain brick caps.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front doorway has been altered by lowering the entry to sidewalk level. The original door, now gone, was set in a brick arch, with a fanlight transom. When the doorway was lowered the fan was bricked in and a rectangular transom inserted below it.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The principal features of the facade are a pair of handsome and stylish triple windows set in blind arches with a recessed solid tympanum on the first and second floors. The triple windows have double-hung wood sash with one-over-one lights and originally had two-over-two-lights in the smaller side windows, and

six-over-six lights in the wider central window. On the north side over the door are single windows; on the second and third stories with double-hung wood sash windows with flat brick arches over. They have one-over-one lights but were originally six-over-six lights. The present double window on third floor over the triple sash was originally a single window. The old sill may still be noticed. The house had exterior shutters but it is not certain whether or not they were original. The sills are stone.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof now covered with asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice: The front cornice is of modest size and appears to be covered with sheet metal. The 1811 fire insurance survey for this house says that the cornice is marble. The rear facade cornice is brick.
- c. Dormers: On the front roof is an unusual small arch-head dormer, originally six lights. Square-head dormer to rear, twelve lights originally.

B. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: Although the interior has been extensively remodeled, the original layout of the front building appears to have been two rooms, front and back, on the south side and the entrance hall and stairs on the north side. Present piazza and rear building with a quadrant are later additions, although there was originally an open piazza on the rear. The original kitchen was in the basement but has now been removed.
2. Stairways: Now removed, the original stairs were described in an 1811 fire insurance survey as "2 flights open newell mahogany rampt handrail stairs, close string, painted half rails and pilasters." Present stairs are Victorian to the third floor. The original stairs to the attic remain, however.
3. Flooring: There were originally two rooms with narrow heart pine boards and the remainder with narrow white pine boards. The present flooring is modern.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The house has plaster walls and ceilings and modern plaster board ceilings have been added on the second and third stories. The first and second floors originally had stucco cornices but these are now gone.

5. Trim: First floor: There are triple windows in the front and rear rooms with crossetted simple architraves and an egg-and-dart cornice. They have paneled recess below with original moldings in the rear and replaced moldings in the front. The baseboard is original. Other trim are later replacements. The 1811 fire insurance survey mentions "folding inside shutters", but there is no evidence now of these, and the window casing looks original. There was originally a large folding door, presumably between the front and rear room. The entry originally had a Venetian arch and folding doors but these are now removed.

Second floor: The door from the hall to the rear room has original rose block and trim. There are triple windows front and rear with panels and architraves similar to the first floor window but without the egg-and-dart cornice. Baseboards are new. The single window in the small room on north front side has simple trim and a paneled recess.

Third floor: The double window in the front is a replacement of the original single window. On this floor are some original partitions, doors and frames.

Attic: Partitions have original simple trim and low baseboards with quarter rounds. There are breast closets to the rear room fireplace; hatch to loft.

6. Hardware: Nothing of note.

7. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: Central heat with radiators. The fireplaces on first floor front and rear rooms are Gothic Revival mottled green and white marble replacements of the original marble fireplaces. They have ogee arches with quatrefoil ornaments on the corners, and are flanked by pilasters. The hearth is marble and the original breast closets remain, except for one missing on the rear fireplace. The original fireplaces have been closed in on the second and third floors. The insurance survey describes the second floor fireplaces as "neat", on third "reeded column", and the third floor as "plain".

b. Lighting: Electric lights only.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces east on a busy north-south city street. It is the last remaining of the row of similar houses comprising Franklin Row.

JOSEPH SIMS HOUSE (FRANKLIN ROW)
HABS No. PA-1186 (Page 5)

2. Enclosures: None.
3. Outbuildings: None.
4. Walks: Cement sidewalk in front.
5. Landscaping: None.

Prepared by:
James C. Massey, Architect
Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
March, 1962

Edited by:
Susan McCown, Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
June, 1984